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IS THE U.S. NEXT?

On weekday mornings, the wealthy business executive leaves his wife and children to the security of a walled-off home patrolled by attack dogs and scanned by closed-circuit television cameras. His armored limousine speeds to his office—by a different route each day—in convoy with two “tail” cars driven by bodyguards. The door to his executive suite is a steel slab camouflaged as wood. A few steps from his desk is a vault-like “safe room” stocked with food and water enough to let him outlast any conceivable siege by terrorists or kidnappers. In

inoculate ourselves against,” says a White House official. “But terrorism is not like the flu; immunity depends upon the health of your political system and your ability to handle crime in general.”

So far, homegrown terrorist groups like the Weathermen have failed to win broad support, and America’s police have dealt effectively, for the most part, with the random hostage-takers, skyjackers, bombers and gunmen who have come their way. Says a police officer in Detroit: “The track record in this country on catching kidnappers and the like is damned good—and people know it.”

All the same, those bets are being hedged. The day before Moro’s body was found last week, President Carter’s national-security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, convened a meeting of the Special Coordination Committee of the National Security Council—a dozen Cabinet and intelligence officers charged with mapping a response to any terrorist attack on Americans. A week before, Brzezinski and a few other committee members, including Transportation Secretary Brock Adams and CIA Director Stansfield Turner, flew to Fort Bragg, N.C., to watch Army “super-SWAT” teams in night exercises against hypothetical terrorists.

SOLDIERS AND SEALS

The American Armed Forces have about 6,000 men—including Army Rangers, Marine amphibious units and Navy SEAL (sea, air and land) platoons—trained for anti-terrorist operations. Their primary mission is to protect Americans abroad. But the Carter Administration acknowledges that the military units also could be used to reinforce FBI and police anti-terror squads in the United States if that became necessary.

U.S. police officers complain that their anti-terror capabilities have been hamstrung by strict new rules requiring court orders for domestic surveillance. “We’re practically out of the domestic security field,” FBI director William Webster said recently. Despite such restrictions, America’s law enforcers are better prepared to deal with serious crime than Italy’s. Although fugitives like Patricia Hearst or Mark Rudd have remained at large for months or years, politically inspired bank robbers or hostage takers usually are rounded up quickly. In contrast, the Italian Red Brigades held Moro

prisoner per capita than practically any country in the world,” says J. Bowyer Bell, a Columbia University expert on terrorism. “But their police are peculiarly inefficient.”

Because the U.S. has no real tradition of political violence, the few terrorist groups that have sprung up, such as the Weathermen, have failed to win even a semblance of grass-roots support. “Terrorism in the U.S., if one can call it that, has tended to be the work of very tiny, ephemeral groups that, for the most part, have not found either the political or economic conditions to generate a constituency,” says Rand Corp. analyst Brian Jenkins. “This is not because we are a nonviolent society, but simply because we have alternatives that have deprived terrorists of that constituency. Pulling a gun may be a common form of personal expression in the U.S., but not of political expression.”

Many political, social or economic reform campaigns in the U.S.—such as the labor, civil-rights or anti-war movements—have spawned violence on their fringes. “But our political system has been resilient,” says Jenkins. “It has had a tremendous capacity to absorb, so that both the grievances and the most articulate proponents of change were co-opted into the political system. Even though Italy has a roughly functioning democracy, little change has actually taken place and the leadership has remained the same.”

THE UNDERGROUND

Compared with Italy, the U.S. also has a shortage of potential terrorists. “We don’t have in this country a large body of students with a sophisticated ideological education,” says Gidon Gottlieb, professor of international law at the University of Chicago. “We don’t have those Marxist fringes. But we do have ethnic fringes.” Many experts predict that the most likely source of new terrorist trouble for the U.S. is the underground of “ethnic” activists, such as the right-wing Cuban exiles in Miami or the Puerto Rican separatists of the bomb-planting FALN. But Jenkins argues that even these groups “aren’t in the same league as the Basques in Spain, or the Breton and Corsican movements in France.”

In 1976, the CIA published a study warning that foreign-based terrorist organizations might soon “succumb to the temptation” to extend “their areas of operation to U.S. shores.” If anything, Aldo Moro’s death has heightened such concerns. But two years have passed since that CIA study came out. “We’re up to our necks in contingency plans,” says a big-city police chief in the Midwest. “So far, we haven’t had any contingencies to use them on. It’s like waiting for the other shoe to drop.” Compared with Italy’s desperate plight, that’s an enviable state of suspense.

—STEVEN STRASSER with PATRICIA J. SETHI
in New York ELAINE SHANNON in Washington



Rangers at Ft. Stewart: An infertile soil for terrorism